



PRESS RELEASE

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LOPEZ-RAMOS SENTENCED IN DEADLY ALIEN SMUGGLING ATTEMPT

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- A 20 year old man from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, was sentenced in federal court today on twenty-five felony counts charging him with alien smuggling resulting in the deaths of fourteen illegal immigrants and serious bodily injury to eleven others.

United States Attorney Paul K. Charlton announced today that JESUS LOPEZ-RAMOS was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Susan R. Bolton to 16 years in prison.

LOPEZ-RAMOS was indicted on May 30, 2001, in connection with the May 19 - 23, 2001, failed attempt to smuggle a large group of undocumented Mexican citizens into the United States near the international border near Lukeville, Arizona.

Documents filed in the case established that on May 19, 2001, a group of twenty-six Mexican nationals were smuggled into the United States near Lukeville by three Mexican guides, later identified as defendant Jesus LOPEZ-RAMOS, "Santos" LNU, and "Lauro" LNU. The guides were working on behalf of a Mexico-based smuggler known to the group as "El Negro," and subsequently identified as EVODIO MANILLA-CABRERA. EVODIO MANILLA-CABRERA has also been indicted in connection with this incident, but has not yet been arrested. LOPEZ-RAMOS had been apprehended while illegally in the United States on at least six prior occasions dating back to May 31, 2000.

During the next four days, the group was led by the smugglers through the desert of Southeastern Arizona in a futile attempt to reach a predetermined point on Arizona State Highway 85 just north of Ajo, Arizona. From this point the group was to

(MORE)

have been transported by automobile to Phoenix, Arizona, where they would await subsequent transportation to their final destinations in Chicago, Illinois, and Lake Placid, Florida. Each member of the group had agreed to pay “El Negro” for arranging for the guides and transportation that would take them into and throughout the United States.

After assembling the group in Sonoyta, Sonora, Mexico, on May 19, 2001, “El Negro” introduced the members of the group to LOPEZ-RAMOS and the other two guides. Members of the group were told by “El Negro” and defendant LOPEZ-RAMOS that the journey would require only two day’s walk to complete. LOPEZ-RAMOS also explained that the group would walk at night to minimize their exposure to the heat and maximize their ability to successfully evade U.S. authorities. Each participant was told to bring sufficient water for his own needs.

Later that date, “El Negro” directed the participants to a bus which took them to a location known as “El Papalote,” located just inside Mexico’s border with the United States. After leaving the bus at the direction of LOPEZ-RAMOS, the group boarded a small van, crossed through the desert into the United States, and drove north for approximately ninety minutes. The group was then told by LOPEZ-RAMOS to disembark, and thereafter began to walk in a north-northeasterly direction toward Ajo, Arizona. After reaching the mountains south of Ajo, LOPEZ-RAMOS turned west and continued to walk through the desert, avoiding all contact with roving Border Patrol vehicles and personnel working in the area.

The majority of the group’s members exhausted their supply of water during the second day of their journey. On May 20, 2001, two aliens elected to abandon the ill-fated attempt and returned to Mexico with the help of “Santos” LNU, one of the three original guides. Those that remained were repeatedly told by guide LOPEZ-RAMOS that their destination was “two or three hours away”. LOPEZ-RAMOS was apparently unaware that he had mistakenly turned in the wrong direction and was leading the group further away from Ajo and into an uninhabited portion of the desert.

The group’s condition deteriorated dramatically during the next two days. The aliens began to consume cactus and their own urine in an attempt to sustain themselves and to fend off the effects of heat exposure and dehydration. As individual members weakened and succumbed, the group splintered into several smaller groups. During the evening of May 21, 2001, several group

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members demanded that LOPEZ-RAMOS depart their location in search of water and transportation for those that remained alive. LOPEZ-RAMOS, collected \$90.00 from the group's members, and set out with "Lauro" LNU, (the only other guide) to locate water for the group. The two men walked toward the northwest approximately eighteen miles over the next twenty-four hours. "Lauro" subsequently succumbed to heat-related causes and LOPEZ-RAMOS was recovered in near-critical condition

On May 23, 2001, five aliens from the original group were located by Border Patrol agents near Welton, Arizona. After ascertaining from the survivors that others had accompanied them into the United States who were as yet unaccounted for, a large-scale rescue operation was initiated. Border Patrol agents subsequently located fourteen victims, including the smuggler known as "Lauro," that had perished as a result of heat-related stress. Twelve others, including defendant Jesus Lopez-Ramos, were found in critical and near critical condition suffering from severe dehydration and heat exposure.

After receiving medical treatment, defendant LOPEZ-RAMOS was arrested and given his *Miranda* warnings in Spanish. LOPEZ-RAMOS stated to Border Patrol Agents that he was one of three guides for the group and that he was to be paid \$100.00 for each individual that he successfully delivered to mile marker 27 on Arizona State Highway 85 north of Ajo, Arizona. This money was to be paid to him by a Mexican national known to him only as "Daniel." LOPEZ-RAMOS stated that although he had successfully navigated the desert on several prior smuggling episodes, he became lost on this trip and was unable to locate Ajo. He stated that the group's water was exhausted during the second day and that the members of the group requested that he strike out alone to locate additional water. LOPEZ-RAMOS stated that, despite his urging, no one in the group was willing to walk any further or to accompany him in search of water. On the morning of the third day, he and fellow smuggler "Lauro" collected \$90.00 from the group and departed to locate and return with water. The two men walked for a full day before "Lauro" became ill. LOPEZ-RAMOS continued to walk alone before abandoning the effort on May 22, 2001. He sat in a shaded area of the desert until rescued by U.S. officials on May 23, 2001.

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LOPEZ-RAMOS had pled guilty without benefit of a plea agreement with federal prosecutors.

Two other defendants, FRANCISCO VASQUEZ-TORRES, DOB 10/8/55, and JOEL VIVEROS-FLORES, DOB 1-4-69, associated with Vasquez Harvesting in Florida, were charged in a superseding indictment on December 4, 2001, by a Grand Jury in Phoenix, Arizona, in connection with this alien smuggling incident.

“Although most directly responsible, we know Mr. Lopez-Ramos did not act alone in causing this tragedy. Today’s sentence represents the government’s continuing efforts in identifying and holding accountable all of those individuals responsible for these deaths, wherever they may be,” said United States Attorney Paul Charlton.

The LOPEZ-RAMOS case was investigated by the Yuma offices of the United States Border Patrol and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, together with the Yuma and Pima County Sheriff’s Offices. The prosecution is being handled by Special Assistant United States Attorney Michael Shelby, who has been appointed by President Bush as the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas, and Assistant United States Attorney Susan Bradley of Phoenix, Arizona.

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